

archaeological evidence for new peoples entering the Western Empire, above all Goths into Spain and Franks into Gaul. All of this is done thoroughly and well, with different interpretations presented and no attempt to force the evidence into too rigid a straightjacket.

These central seven thematic chapters are framed by three that are essentially chronological. In ch. 1, E.C. examines the archaeology of the third-century crisis, in particular to question conventional chronologies that attribute all destruction and all cultural change to the disastrous events of the 250s to 270s. He sensibly does not try to argue away all evidence of barbarian devastation, but ‘a central contention of this book [is] that the threshold of “accelerated change” in the archaeological record lies not in the mid to late third century, but the better part of a hundred years earlier, from the later second century’ (23). Then, towards the end of the book, in ch. 9, E.C. examines the archaeological evidence for the fifth century and argues that this century saw such marked changes (for instance in the abandonment of villas and networks of exchange) that by around A.D. 500 one has entered a different world, both in terms of the end of Roman systems and of the beginning of new non-Roman ones. Finally, in ch. 10, E.C. argues for seeing A.D. 200 to 500 as a coherent period that can reasonably be termed ‘late Roman’.

Does his argument for an archaeological late Roman period from c. 200 to c. 500 work? Most archaeologists would probably agree with his end date, though personally I would push it back a bit, to around A.D. 450. Historians, using textual evidence, are prone to extend ‘late antique’ Gaul at least to the time of Gregory of Tours at the end of the sixth century, but the archaeological evidence, with which E.C. is working, unequivocally shows very substantial economic and social change by A.D. 500. I am less well qualified to assess his start date of A.D. 200, but E.C. himself is happy to admit that this ‘threshold’ (as he terms it) was a subtle one — when two centuries of dramatic development under the ‘High Empire’ began to stall and, in places, to fall into reverse. Certainly, E.C. is entirely convincing when he argues that events in the latter half of the third century cannot explain everything that changed in late Roman times; there are too many regional and chronological differences to support such a simplistic explanation.

This is a book aimed at scholars and students at graduate or advanced undergraduate level; it is too long and too detailed for a wider readership. I suspect it will be consulted primarily in bits for its very useful, and up-to-date, syntheses of the state of scholarship — for instance, in ch. 8, E.C. is admirably full, clear and balanced on the complex issue of whether or not one can equate grave goods and ethnicity. But his book also deserves to be taken seriously for its discussion of periodization. A great deal of ink has been consumed considering how late in time one should extend ‘Late Antiquity’; but comparatively little scholarship has been dedicated to examining this fashionable period’s origins. E.C.’s book is a serious attempt to do just that, through painstaking analysis of the archaeology of Roman Spain and Gaul.

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F. RIESS, *NARBONNE AND ITS TERRITORY IN LATE ANTIQUITY: FROM THE VISIGOTHS TO THE ARABS*. Farnham/Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013. Pp. xvi + 288, maps, pls. ISBN 9781409455349 (bound); 9781472408273 (e-book). £75.00.

Frank Riess writes with great knowledge, engagement and passion, and offers much to be grateful for, for example in his study of the geology and hydrography of the port of Narbonne (19–32). However, there is also much to take issue with. His title is deceptive. This is not a standard regional survey, but the presentation of a particular historical argument: that the stormy relationship between Narbonne and the Visigothic kingdom of Spain, with its capital at Toledo, during the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. resulted from the city’s strong self-identity which went back to its foundation as a Roman colony in 118 B.C. This feeling of difference found ultimate expression in Paulus’ short-lived secessionist ‘Eastern Kingdom’ of 673 (189–90). R. complains bitterly that Narbonese separatism has been neglected by Spanish, French and Catalan historians, happy to adopt the ‘Toledo-centred’ (133) bias of the extant Visigothic texts, in order to present the inexorable rise of their own, exclusive, national identities.

So far, so good. Separatist feelings have been identified in other periods and areas of Gallo-French history, so it is not impossible that they existed in the case of Narbonne. Problems arise out of R.’s

handling of his thesis. Because R. does not offer a standard survey, he does not provide a standard historico-archaeological structure: background, town, country, economy and society, culture and religion, synthesis. Instead, influenced by 'reception' and literary criticism, he offers a work of 'metahistory' (244), aimed at taking the 'study of Narbonne to a more imaginative referential level' (13). He therefore pays as much attention to what people thought had happened, or even what they thought they were seeing, as to what had actually happened, or what they were actually seeing. The complete set of these perceptions, encompassing Roman, late Roman and Visigothic Narbonne, R. calls the city's 'biography' (5), of which successive generations of its inhabitants were constantly aware, in a single, timeless sentiment of pride and self-identity. To confirm the existence of this biography R. offers an extended series of vignettes of Narbonese difference and pride taken from authors ranging from Ausonius, Orosius and Hydatius to John of Biclár, Count Bulgar and Fructuosus of Braga.

This treatment is highly discursive, and key topics appear in a strange order. For example, the foundation and development of Narbo Martius is discussed very late (110–23); and consideration of Visigothic taxation is prefaced by a relatively detailed introduction to the late Roman fiscal system (206–14). R.'s book is, in fact, quite unlike anything else I have ever read on Gaul. Apart from its unorthodox approach, it is unusually hard on the reader. There is a general lack of clarity of expression. R. seldom explains the historical background: in hugely stiff part-narratives, Roman, Visigothic, Frankish, Burgundian and Ostrogothic rulers and generals appear and disappear with little introduction. There is poor provision of diagrams and maps (in particular, around 192–8, to illustrate R.'s reconstruction of the boundaries of the Narbonese diocese, and of the Narbonese frontier: introductory Map 5 is insufficient). Important issues, for example the Pirene thesis (5), are mentioned, but not followed up. R. does not translate quotations in modern languages, and is inconsistent in his translation of those in Latin. His italicization of the names of Roman provinces and his uncertainty with the capitalization of German substantives are irritating.

Ultimately, however, the book's value depends on the persuasiveness of its main argument. I remain unconvinced. Any study of separatism in Gaul must begin much earlier than the fifth century but, except for some fleeting references (59–60, 83–4, 93–4), there is no consideration of wider 'Gallic attitudes' to central powers. And any study of separatism in 'Narbonne' must define what the term means, but from the start (cf. 4) R. is never entirely clear as to whether this is the city, the city and its territory, the wider area around both, the province of Narbonensis, or the province and its region. Fundamentally, though he demonstrates the continuing importance of the city of Narbonne, he does not prove any powerful core metropolitan 'identity'. Indeed, even Paulus apparently had ambitions to be king at Toledo, too (204). That Paulus appears to have ruled over Narbonensis and, in modern terms, Catalonia (cf. 204) also causes difficulties for R. His response is a typically clumsy statement (189): 'The identity of this geographical territory, a separate zone whether east or north of the Iberian Peninsula, appears to confirm the abiding role of Narbonne as a regional centre and capital of a distinct political entity.' This is assertion, not proof, lacking essential details, for example, on the place of Tarragona and Barcelona. As Franks, Visigoths, Burgundians, Ostrogoths and Byzantines jostled to secure the littoral in the 'Great Game' (12, 132–3) of Mediterranean politics, Visigothic Narbonne will have found itself in an unenviable position. As R. says (172), a letter of Bulgar, written probably in 612, shows Narbonensis as a 'frontier-zone': 'an advanced post for Merovingian and Visigothic diplomacy with skirmishing and hostilities representing positions not securely held by either side: boundaries and frontiers both challenged and crossed.' In such a situation, Narbonese (whatever this may mean) attempts at self-assertion may have been no more than manifestations of 'marcher' politics, to be expected in weak state-structures, as peripheral communities, perceiving neglect, occasionally lost patience with the core. R. notes (183–7) similar, albeit less extreme, sentiments in Cordoba.

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